

Efforts in Conservation – Save the Nullarbor

By Bronwen Eberhard

Background


Last year, 2023, was forty years since Stefan first went to the Nullarbor and my fifth trip. Until I met Stefan, I knew nothing about it, except the name and a highway crossing. Well that not knowing, not understanding has all changed. I fell in love with the Nullarbor, and I loved the way Stefan could articulate the landscape, above and below ground, bring all the eons of time processes together, in a way that I could catch a glimmer of the wonder and grasp a little of the enormity, even with my non-scientific background.

That was 2017. I stopped to have him start again so I could video record his speaking as he pointed at the fossils in the doline wall. I learnt to fly a drone on the Bunda Cliffs - not the easiest place to learn. I did many hours of drone flying and we recorded stills and video, me flying and Stefan framing the photos he could see needed to be taken.

I came back from the two Nullarbor trips in 2019 describing my journey, from being a drone pilot learning to fly to becoming a bird soaring above all the wondrous views of the Nullarbor. The women's group listening to me said from my descriptions they felt like they were there. Cindy Mathers, reached out to me after hearing me speak. An Australian woman who has been mentored by and worked with first nation people for more than 20 years. She is now on the committee for Save the Nullarbor.

Claire Zammit's work makes huge paradigm shifts from shame, lack, isolation and competition to the strong principles of women supporting each other to be more than we can see in ourselves, through sponsorship and collaboration, and was pivotal in my signing up to be part of a year long weekly women's pod; and through that pod I met Cathy Courtney.

That was all two years ago, fast forward through our nine weeks filming and photographing the Nullarbor. It was through Cathy that we met Pippy and Josh Pomeranz, PJ Pictures and Spectrum Films, who generously offered to make a sizzle reel from our footage.

 A sizzle reel is a short 3 to 5 minute video presentation aimed to create interest and highlight important information.

Issues and Efforts

When we first heard, in 2022, about the proposed Western Green Energy Hub (WGEH) – 3,000 wind turbines, 25 million solar panels, 15,000 square kilometres of irreparably damaged Nullarbor karst, Stefan said, “We need to get out there one last time and see it before it is destroyed”. We knew we would schedule a trip to the Nullarbor as a priority in our calendar for the following winter. We both grew up in Tasmania and witnessed what happened to Lake Pedder (we are still inspired and saddened by the photos of Lake Pedder taken by Olegas Truchanas before it was flooded), so we shifted to thinking what we needed to document on the Nullarbor with film and photography to be able to show what it looked like before the WGEH project went ahead.

In the month before we departed Tasmania, as we were preparing equipment and provisions for our trip, there were new photographic books published respectively by Grant Dixon and Martin Hawes. We spoke with Bob Brown at the launch of Martin Hawes book which had a stunning photo of Vanishing Falls. Bob was fascinated with Stefan's description of his trip into the cave resurgence 2 km downstream. Stefan spoke with Bob Brown about the WGEH proposal and the necessity to photograph and film the Nullarbor to document its beauty and raise awareness about what is at stake and our intention to go out and film the Nullarbor. Bob said we needed 3 things for a campaign. An iconic photo, a map and a film.

Bob's firm advice was to initiate campaigning as a matter of urgency because:

- a) The WGEH project has been flying under the radar of public scrutiny for far too long already (2 to 3 years), and
- b) By us being proactive, the developer will need to respond to our case for protection rather than the other way round.

Stefan had always been interested in photography and we had done many trips into the Junee-Florentine karst to get photos for a book he is making to showcase the caves of Tasmania. I asked Stefan to coach me in vertical rope techniques in the tree at our house a couple of times so I could help him with the photographs he wanted to take. It meant camping out in freezing conditions and standing around in cold, wet caves to get the just right photo. And I was constantly working on managing my fear of heights and being 'out there'. Moving through the cave on rope to the extreme spots Stefan would see as perfect photo opportunities. I had no idea abseiling next to waterfalls and all the prusiking I did would be preparing me for a cave blowhole entrance like Thampanna on the Nullarbor!

We knew we needed to capture some iconic images. And make a legible map. Stefan had already been working on maps with Peter Bell for the Tasmanian cave systems. But we knew we weren't experienced at professional film editing or producing. We planned to get lots of beautiful time lapse, video, stills, macro, and more drone footage. We already had a lot of drone footage from our two Nullarbor trips in 2019. From our previous experience in 2019 filming on the Bunda Cliffs and trying to record interviews with the Banunga Caving group we knew we needed better audio recording equipment. Through Stefan's friend Joe Shemesh, the "16 Legs" film cameraman, we contacted a sound recording specialist, George Goerss at Sonic Solutions, ordered the equipment he recommended and paid for a day of learning how it was supposed to work.

We spent 12 weeks on the road during winter 2023, extending our trip twice so that we had 9 weeks total on the Nullarbor filming and working from five locations. Stefan was on a steep learning curve, taking time-lapses morning, evening and through the night to capture the sky and starscapes in just the right configuration over the dolines. We also did daily voice to camera recordings of Stefan explaining the science of the landscape and the karst features. Bringing it back to the big picture of the integration of the landscape and the necessity to protect it in its entirety. We were totally immersed in the landscape on a big picture level, and in the detail. Stefan is very focused on creating images that capture the grandeur, beauty, and essence of a place. I am more focused on process and do a lot of prose and descriptive writing. Our individual processes for how we feel the landscape interweave, inform each other, and enhance our clarity.

The longer we spent on the Nullarbor, the more convinced we became that it would be an absolute travesty if the WGEH development were allowed to go ahead on this unique and fragile karst. We then focused on how to bring it to the big picture. That is, protecting the Nullarbor because of its own merits versus directly fighting the development - we hope that our photos and filming will help the Australian public, politicians, the developer, and their financial backers to see that the Nullarbor is a precious place that deserves to be protected.



Figure 1: One of the stunning photographs in the gallery of the 'Save the Nullarbor' website, photo Stefan Eberhard Photography – note the person on rope in the bottom middle of frame for scale!

Neither of us have the knowledge or expertise to debate the engineering and economics involved with this energy project. Rather, we want to focus on how we can use the footage to help raise international and national awareness, and that the Nullarbor Plain is NOT the location for industrialization. We had many hours and days to talk over lots of ideas. But we always grappled with how we were actually going to convert the mounting terabytes of footage into something useable. Neither of us are filmmakers, nor activists, rather, we would say that we are defenders of nature.

Scope of the Film Work

As we were coming off Mundrabilla Station, we sent a photo of me prusiking out of Thampanna to my friend Cathy whom I had met in a professional women's group. I mentioned we had no idea how we were going to manage the footage. Cathy asked if she could show the photo to her daughter and son in law as they are film makers and they might be able to point us in the right direction.

We had a zoom conversation, with Pippy and Josh Pomeranz of PJ Pictures and Spectrum Films, soon after we returned to Tasmania, the outcome of which has been nothing short of amazing. They are very keen to support saving the Nullarbor. It took us several weeks to put two rough cut reels together to showcase the beauty and the type of footage we have, and to give them an idea of the threat.

Pippy and Josh very generously offered to provide their time, resources, and post-production studio to help make a 2 to 3 minute sizzle reel for social media, if we could provide \$5000 to cover an outside editor they would need to hire. We readily agreed. The market value of their pro-bono studio production contribution was many times above the editing component.

We became very busy again sorting all the footage into A clips and transcribing the audio, making "maps" and story boards so Pippy could understand the film sites, their relevance, and our messaging. We were on a tight time schedule as we wanted to have the social media clip ready by December.

It was all very exciting, but we were feeling daunted about what we would do with the sizzle reel when it was produced. Neither of us are social media experts. However, Pippy came to the rescue again and coached us in what we needed to do. Pippy gave us large amounts of her time to put together the Instagram #savethenullarbor profile. We also set up a Facebook profile / page with the same name.

Our life is spent almost every waking hour consumed with the Nullarbor. Since December 2023 the nascent 'Save the Nullarbor' has grown organically in leaps and bounds, briefly summarized below.

- A petition was started on [change.org](https://www.change.org) on 11th December, it currently has 4032 signatures and continues to grow steadily.
- Prior to Xmas and prior to the public launch of the sizzle reel, again on Bob Brown's advice, we sent letters expressing our concern about the WGEH proposal, along with a complimentary preview copy of the sizzle reel, to the Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and the Minister for Environment and Water, Tanya Plibersek.
- Sizzle reel - launched 3 January 2024, on Instagram and Facebook – it had 1,490 views in its first 6 weeks.
- Cygnet Folk Festival - sizzle reel was premiered live on the big screen at Bob Brown's Earth Celebration Event at the internationally renowned Cygnet Folk Festival, 14th January 2024, along with the Bob Brown Foundation Gallery photo exhibition. Feedback from the screening - most Australians, even environmentally conscious types, have absolutely no idea about the caves under the Nullarbor. The 2.5-minute reel was one of the most talked about features of the event. TAKE HOME MESSAGE - We need to get the sizzle reel seen in every Australian household.
- During the three-day festival, the Bob Brown Foundation (BBF) used the Lovett Gallery to display different campaign media and materials. The BBF generously invited us to use their gallery space to promote 'Save the Nullarbor' and so we frantically ordered a selection of Nullarbor fine art photos to be printed and framed, which were displayed alongside the poster.
- Poster - when we told Andy Spate about the sizzle reel video being included in Bob Brown's Earth Celebration at the Cygnet Folk Festival 12-14 January, Andy asked if we had a poster or leaflet to hand out as well. We had a leaflet already drafted and waiting in the wings, and Andy's generous offer to cover the printing costs spurred us into action.

Figure 2: Leaflets ready to hand out at the Cygnet Folk Festival (right).



SAVE the Nullarbor

World's largest arid limestone karst is threatened!



The Nullarbor Plain harbours a spectacular hidden world of ancient caves, blowholes, dolines, and rock holes, of staggering beauty, exceptional scientific values, and priceless cultural importance.




The proposed Western Green Energy Hub - 3,000 wind turbines, 25 million solar panels, 15,000 square kilometres - is utterly incompatible with the fragile and globally significant Nullarbor karst.

Industrialisation of the Nullarbor Plain will permanently damage this unique and fragile karst landscape which holds superlative natural and cultural values of World Heritage significance.



It is imperative that this enormous, proposed energy project is developed on an alternative location which is NOT on the Nullarbor limestone.

Please scan this QR Code for links to...



Watch the Sizzle Reel

Sign the petition

Find us on social media

Share to raise awareness



linktr.ee/savethenullarbor

Dr Stefan Eberhard
Mrs Bronwen Eberhard
Hobart, Tasmania, Australia

- A bunch of posters have since been sent to Ceduna and our friends there have distributed them around the town, and we are in the process of trying to get them into the roadhouses along the Eyre Highway although not overly hopeful of success with this.
- Greens MPs in the loop – in late January Bob Brown circulated the sizzle reel and Nullarbor Facts Booklet to 16 GREENS MPs. Brad Petit MLC WA (Fremantle) shared the sizzle on his Instagram account with supportive comments.
- Social Media: Instagram @savethenullarbor / Facebook @save.the.nullarbor - Stefan has been posting photos with educational text about the Nullarbor two to three times a week, and the occasional short timelapse reel. February 14th, 'The Valentines Day Reels', another of Pippy's ideas, brought in a lot of views - over 700 of Bob Brown and his I love the Nullarbor and call to action. And over 500 of the video compilation of lots of different people saying I love the Nullarbor/we love the Nullarbor.

Figure 3: Poster pdf available for download on the 'Save the Nullarbor' website (left)

- Website –<https://savethenullarbor.org/> launched early March 2024.
- Save the Nullarbor Inc. For multiple reasons it became increasingly clear that 'Save the Nullarbor' needed to have a committee and become an incorporated association. This is so that we are a recognizable group, and the association can receive donations to fund campaigning costs. Aside from the sizzle reel and first batch of posters, Stefan and I have so far funded everything from our own pockets, and this is not sustainable!

The Principal Object of 'Save the Nullarbor' is the protection and restoration of Australia's Nullarbor karst region including its karst features, adjacent seas, and all of its natural and human heritage values.

This will be achieved by promoting the protection and restoration of the Nullarbor karst region including its karst features, adjacent seas, and all of its natural and human heritage values, and the provision of information and education about:

- (a) the Nullarbor karst region and its environs,
- (b) threats to the Nullarbor karst region and its environs,
- (c) the promotion of the Nullarbor karst region's World Heritage values.

The inaugural meeting was held on the 19th of February 2024. Please check out the website to see learn more.

Campaigning is multifaceted for us, and we believe that any motivated individual or organisation can contribute irrespective of their organisational affiliations. We do not need to be in competition with each other or any other organisation. Anything and everything that is being done, by any individual or by any organisation, needs to be acknowledged as an integral part of a campaigning movement to turn the tide of attention onto the Nullarbor, to raise public awareness that this magnificent karst region is existentially threatened by industrialisation. Collective and united support will show to the Australian public, politicians and proponents of the Western Green Energy Hub, that this cause is backed by people with unassailably relevant expertise, passion, and commitment to protecting the Nullarbor's superlative natural and cultural values.

The link below will give access to the website, sizzle reel video, social media, and the petition. Here you can sign the petition, follow 'Save the Nullarbor' and share on social media to your friends and colleagues nationally and internationally, to continue promoting the cause. Thank you!

<https://linktr.ee/savethenullarbor>



Figure 4: Bronwyn and Stefan Eberhard with Nullarbor artworks in the Lovatt Gallery during the Bob Brown Foundation Earth Celebration event in Cygnet, 2024

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